

California State Board of Forestry
and the
California Fish and Game Commission

JOINT POLICY STATEMENT ON COHO SALMON

The Fish and Game Commission (Commission) and the Board of Forestry (Board) find that the coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) is a vitally important ecological and economic resource in California.

The Commission and Board also find that, although detailed population data are not available, population trends for the vast majority of coho salmon runs in the state appear to have significantly declined. Numerous factors have been implicated as contributing to the decline. Important factors in freshwater habitats may be impacts from timber operations, impoundments for hydropower, subsistence and sport fishing, and development of estuarine habitats. In marine environment, commercial and sport fishing harvest, predation and the effects of natural changes in ocean conditions may all contribute to the recent population trends.

Several actions have been proposed to both the state and federal governments to provide special protective status to coho salmon. Under the California Endangered Species Act, the Commission has accepted a petition to list the coho salmon as a threatened species south of San Francisco Bay and has noticed it as a candidate species. The National Marine Fisheries Service is considering three petitions to list the species under the Federal Endangered Species Act along the entire Pacific Coast. The Board has also been asked by the California Department of Fish and Game to list the coho as a sensitive species pursuant to the California Forest Practice Rules.

The Board and Commission are pleased that representatives from the farming, fishing, and forest industries (FFF Communities) are working with private landowners to reverse the declines in coho salmon. In addition, close cooperation between the state and federal government is expected to provide a coordinated management strategy for addressing this issue.

Therefore, the Commission and Board adopt the following joint policy for their respective departments:

- (a) Department personnel shall be guided by the understanding that it is the desire of the state of California to recover coho salmon populations to levels that will sustain healthy wild populations and the human uses that depend on them.
- (b) Department personnel shall actively cooperate with other state agencies, the federal government, private landowners, academic institutions, and the public to craft a management strategy for coho salmon in California.
- (c) A comprehensive management strategy for California coho salmon populations should, at a minimum, be coordinated with the National Marine Fisheries Service and include the following elements:
 - (1) Area-specific population and habitat goals and objectives.
 - (2) A GIS-based database for managing population and habitat data.

- (3) A scientifically sound monitoring program for determining fish population and habitat trends.
- (4) Provisions for change when significant new information is available.
- (d) Staff shall report annually, in joint session, to the Board and Commission.

In addition, the Commission specifically charges the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) with the following:

- (a) Contingent upon funding and staffing availability, DFG shall complete comprehensive watershed analyses on all major coho salmon streams to provide the best scientific information for developing habitat protection measures;
 - (1) The first priority for watershed assessments should be for watersheds south of San Francisco Bay;
 - (2) Where field data are not readily available, assessments should focus first on the professional opinions of fishery experts and data that can be easily obtained. These assessments should be quickly prepared for interim use. DFG should focus next on more comprehensive assessments that can be completed with data that can be compiled in 12-18 months. Finally, comprehensive assessments for long-term use should be completed. These assessments should be based on systematic field surveys and monitoring.
- (b) DFG shall develop a standardized set of procedure and strategies department-wide for review of timber harvest plans that are selected for review to promote uniform responses to the Board and CDF;
- (c) DFG shall continue to review timber harvesting activities and, when appropriate, recommend measures which will mitigate significant adverse impacts upon coho salmon;
- (d) DFG shall provide active liaison to the Board and CDF on issues to timber harvest practices on fish and wildlife resources, particularly salmon and steelhead;
- (e) In the event of disagreement over implementation of this policy with CDF, the DFG shall inform the Commission of the disagreement; and
- (f) Annually, DFG will include a statement in the Director's report to the Commission addressing the status of implementation of this policy and coho salmon resources.

The Board directs Board Staff and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) as follows:

- (a) Prepare a supportable listing package for designating the coho as a sensitive species under CCR 919.12, 939.12 and 959.12;
- (b) Prepare a supportable rules package for protecting coho salmon habitat during timber operations;

- (c) Coordinate the preparation of the listing and rules packages with the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Resources Agency, the DFG and the public;
- (d) Administer Department programs consistent with this policy statement;
- (e) Until a coho salmon management strategy is developed for California, provide particular attention to potential impacts to coho salmon in the THPs Review process and seek input from the DFG where THPs are submitted for areas containing coho salmon habitats;
- (f) Consider coho salmon habitat in the context of overall aquatic ecosystem assessment and management in the pilot watershed projects for the Klamath Province;
- (g) In the event of disagreement over implementation of this policy with DFG, the CDF shall inform the Board of the disagreement; and
- (h) Annually, CDF will report to the Board regarding the status of implementation of this policy and of the coho salmon resources.